

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 05462 261440Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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O P 261212Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1894
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITYN
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5462

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: PM/PNA MOVE CLOSER TO TALKS

1. FRONT PAGE STORIES IN ALL MAJOR NEWSPAPERS IN PAKISTAN
TODAY QUOTED PNA SPOKESMAN SARDAR QAYYUM THAT "THEY (THE
PNA LEADERS) HAVE ALL AGREED UPON A BASIS FOR GIVING
A GO-AHEAD SIPDAL TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR NEGOTIATIONS..."
HIS ANNOUNCEMENT ENGENDERED RENEWED OPTIMISM IN POLITICAL
CIRCLES THAT THE PNA AND THE PMA ARE PREPARED TO BEGIN
NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT A SETTLEMENT OF THE DISPUTE WHICH
HAS DIVIDED PAKISTAN FOR THE LAST TWO MONTHS. ALTHOUGH
SARDAR QAYYUM CONTINUES TO DENY THE EXISTENCE OF A SPECIFIC
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 05462 261440Z

FORMULA FOR SETTLING THEIR DIFFERENCES, HE DID INDICATE TO
NEWSMEN ON MAY 25 THAT A BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS HAS EMERGED
OUT OF THE INFORMAL TALKS WHICH HAVE BEEN DRAGGING ON THROUGH-
OUT THE COURSE OF THE CRISIS. SARDAR QAYYUM NEITHER CONFIRMED
NOR DENIED REPORTS THAT THE PM HAD ACCEPTED, IN PRINCIPLE, THE
HOLDING OF FRESH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS BUT POLITICAL
OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT THE PNA WOULD NOT ENTER INTO THE

DIALOGUE UNLESS SUCH AN AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED.

2. IT REMAINS UNCLEAR AS TO WHEN THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BEGIN. SARDAR QAYYUM TOLD THE NEWSMEN THAT HE DID NOT EXPECT A MEETING BETWEEN BHUTTO AND MUFTI MAHMUD BEFORE MAY 27 THE PLO SPECIAL ENVOY, HANI AL-HASSAN, TOLD REPORTERS ON MAY 25 THAT HE FELT THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS WAS NEARING A TURNING POINT AND HE HOPED SOME FRUITFUL RESULT WOULD EMERGE WITHIN THE NEXT FORTY-EIGHT HOURS. IN AN INTERVIEW TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE URDU WEEKLY MEYAR ON MAY 26 PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO, ACCORDING TO A PPI REPORT, HAS SAID THAT HE EXPECTED THAT SOME RESULTS WOULD BECOME VISIBLE WITHIN TEN TO TWELVE DAYS ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE PM MEANT TEN TO TWELVE DAYS FROM TODAY OR FROM THE DATE THAT NEGOTIATIONS ACTUALLY BEGIN. IN A HARD-LINE INTERVIEW WHICH ALSO SAW HIM CHARACTERIZE THE PNA AS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE PARTY OF THE PETIT BOURGEOISIE, BHUTTO SAID THAT THE DIALOGUE WILL BE HELD WITHOUT ANY PRE-CONDITIONS. IT SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY, THOUGH, THAT THE PNA WOULD ACCEPT AT THIS TIME AN OFFER THAT THEY HAVE BEEN REJECTING SINCE EARLY MARCH. THE ABSENCE OF PRE-CONDITIONS WOULD GIVE THE PM THE OPPORTUNITY TO DRAG OUT THE TALKS INDEFINITELY WHILE THE PNA WOULD LOSE CREDIBILITY WITH MANY OF ITS FOLLOWERS WHO MAINTAIN THAT THE PNA LEADERSHIP WOULD BE NO MATCH FOR THE POLITICALLY SAVVY BHUTTO AT A CONFERENCE TABLE AND WHO WOULD SEE AN OFFER TO NEGOTIATE AS A SELL-OUT.

3. ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT, EVEN IF THE PM HAS AGREED TO HOLD NEW ELECTIONS, AS HE QUITE POSSIBLY HAS, A PRINCIPAL
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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 05462 261440Z

BONE OF CONTENTION WITHIN THE ELECTION ISSUE ITSELF, NAMELY THE TIME FRAME WITHIN WHICH THE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD, REMAINS UNADDRESSED. FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES THE PNA WANTS THE ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IMMEDIATELY WHEREAS THE PM WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN A YEAR'S RESPIRE IN WHICH TO REGAIN SOME OF THE STATURE HE HAS LOST OVER THE COURSE OF THE CRISIS PRIOR TO ENTERING A NEW CAMPAIGN. SIGNIFICANTLY, TAHIR MOHAMMAD, FEDERAL MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, HAS BACKED OFF OF THE STATEMENT HE MADE ON MAY 24, GENERALLY INTERPRETED AS A TRIAL BALLOON, IN WHICH HE HINTED THAT THERE MAY BE NEW ELECTIONS NEXT MARCH. ON MAY 25 HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD BEEN MISQUOTED AND THAT WHAT HE ACTUALLY MEANT WAS THAT HOLDING ELECTIONS PRIOR TO NEXT MARCH WOULD BE FATAL FOR THE COUNTRY. REGARDLESS OF THE FACT THAT HE DID NOT RETRACT THE STATEMENT COMPLETELY THE PNA LEADERSHIP CANNOT BE PLEASED WITH THE CHANGE IN WORDING AND, IN HIS COMMENTS TO THE PRESS LAST NIGHT, SARDAR QAYYUM SINGLED OUT TAHIR MOHAMMAD FOR CRITICISM, SAYING THAT OFF-THE-CUFF REMARKS SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT SUCH A CRITICAL MOMENT AND THAT HE, QAYYUM, WAS IN A MUCH BETTER POSITION THAN THE

INFORMATION MINISTER TO MAKE A WELL-INFORMED STATEMENT.

4. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ARAB WORLD CONTINUE TO PLAY A MAJOR BEHIND THE SCENES ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE PNA HAS DENIED THAT HANI AL-HASSAN VISITED SIHALA ON MAY 23, THE EVENING OF HIS ARRIVAL IN ISLAMABAD, THE PLO ENVOY TOLD REPORTERS THAT HE HAD MET WITH MUFTI MAHMUD ON THE MORNING OF MAY 25. THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR ALSO CONTINUES TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND INFORMED OBSERVERS ARE BEGINNING TO CREDIT THE SAUDIS WITH BEING THE CATALYST BEHIND THE CURRENT MOVE TOWARD A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

5. RADIO PAKISTAN ANNOUNCED, ON THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 26, THAT SARDAR QAYYUM HAS INDICATED THAT THE PNA LEADERS HAVE ASKED THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR TO PASS ON TO THE PRIME MINISTER A MESSAGE INDICATING THEIR WILLINGNESS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PM.

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PAGE 04 ISLAMA 05462 261440Z

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